



**Testimony in Support of  
S.B. 2  
AN ACT CONCERNING THE SAFETY, EDUCATION AND SOCIAL EQUITY OF  
CHILDREN IN RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC**

**March 9, 2021  
Committee on Children**

Senator Anwar, Representative Linehan, and Distinguished Members of the Committee on Children:

My name is Emma Morelli, and I am a legal intern at the Center for Children's Advocacy and a student at UCONN School of Law. The Center provides legal representation for underserved children in Connecticut's communities, through individual representation, education and training, and systemic advocacy. The Center focuses on representing children in child welfare, immigration, juvenile delinquency, public health, and special education matters.

**On behalf of the Center for Children's Advocacy, I submit this testimony in support of S.B. 2, An Act Concerning the Safety, Education, and Social Equity of Children in Response to the Pandemic.**

The Center supports the entirety of the comprehensive bill placed before you today. As we are all well aware, the pandemic has greatly affected the children of this state on every level – from having their basic every-day needs met, to their ability to engage in school, to visitation with their parents if the children are in foster care. Most tangibly, however, an impact that every parent in this state can relate to has been the impact on our children's mental health, specifically for those who were used to seeing friends and peers every day, and have since been isolated via remote learning platforms.

As such, I want to specifically focus on Sections One and Two of this bill, concerning the training of both professional and lay persons working with children as it relates to suicide prevention and mental health screening. The treatment and monitoring of our children's mental well-being is vital to their futures.

According to the American Psychological Association, suicide has historically been the second leading cause of death for those between 15 and 24 years of age.<sup>1</sup> The ongoing pandemic has increased this risk. Back in November, the CDC reported that while the overall number of trips to the Emergency Department for children's mental health had decreased, like many kinds of visits to the hospital during the pandemic, the percentage of total Emergency Department visits that were specifically for children's

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<sup>1</sup> "Talking to Teens: Suicide Prevention," American Psychological Association: <https://www.apa.org/topics/teen-suicide-prevention>

mental health issues has increased: for children aged 5-11, the proportion of mental health-related visits increased approximately 24%, and for 12-17 year-olds, by 31%.<sup>2</sup>

The increase in emergencies concerning children's mental health can be correlated to a reduction of access to services in the community, where many children receive such services through clinical and community agencies, including schools.<sup>3</sup> Subsequently, the lack of available mental health services when children are not physically in school, combined with the overall pandemic-related stress that children face, makes it crucial to educate more people to address suicide prevention and mental health intervention for the children of this state. This bill, in part, aims to do just that, by establishing a youth suicide prevention training program, and requiring certain licensed healthcare professionals to complete training in mental health and suicide screening and prevention.

In my time with the Center, I have been exposed to young clients with significant mental health issues, greatly exacerbated by isolation, as well as children who are facing great challenges with school during the pandemic. It is evident that the children of this state need a comprehensive bill such as this to help navigate the trauma left in COVID-19's wake. Not only has the pandemic affected them, it has highlighted how fragile a child's mental health can be. That is why the measures to educate and train those that work with children in this capacity are essential.

For these reasons, the Center for Children's Advocacy strongly supports the passage of S.B. 2. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully Submitted,



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<sup>2</sup> Mental Health-Related Emergency Department Visits Among Children Aged <18 Years During the COVID-19 Pandemic, November 13, 2020: <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6945a3.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Id.